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Hohenzollern Prussia: Claiming a Legacy of Legitimacy

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Hohenzollern Prussia: Claiming a Legacy of Legitimacy



By

Jeremy Brooks Weed

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I. Introduction to the Hohenzollerns of Prussia

On 23 January 1793 the period of dynastic claims ended for Prussia in northeastern Europe. With the Second Partition of Poland the last of the territories for which Prussia held a dynastic claim, the cities of Danzig and Thorn, were annexed and incorporated into the Prussian state. The Second Partition of Poland; however, also marked a major shift in the concept of what was a legitimate *Casus Belli*. While dynastic claims had been a universally recognized method for claiming territory under the rules of 17th and 18th century monarchical system, the Second Partition of Poland saw something new. Unlike previous Prussian expansion, the partition included vast swathes of land to which Prussia had no territorial rights and were populated largely by Poles. This shift towards territorial aggrandizement without a dynastic claim marked the beginning of modern statecraft. In the 19th century this territorial expansion would be combined with nationalism to give birth to the modern nation state. This shift marked the end of the Frederician era for the Kingdom of Prussia. With this move towards state craft expansion, the safe claims expansion of the Fredricks was replaced with claimless expansion that overextended both the army and the state bureaucracy. This transformation marked the end of the first expansion of Prussia.¹

The first period of expansion for Prussia saw, a war ravaged state of the Holy Roman Empire, develop into one of Europe's great monarchical states. This would be achieved through the leadership of four absolutist rulers following the conclusion of the Thirty Years War. Though Prussia was a geographically scattered and patchwork state, Prussia and its Hohenzollern rulers held fast to dynastic claims despite facing states with superior manpower and monies at their disposal. Over time the acquisition of these claimed territories allowed for the construction of an influential

¹ Jeremy Black, *European International Relations: 1648-1815* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), for *Casus Belli* definition and information about the Second Partition of Poland see Jeremy Black.

European state. Prussia through a combination of careful management, a series governmental reforms, and victories on the field of battle was able to expand through the use of these territorial claims over time. With the successful incorporation of these lands into the Prussia state, Prussia was able to become one of the leading states of Europe by 1786.

The fact that Prussia developed into an influential state with a strong economy and military is the result of the careful management of Prussia's resources and the gradual expansion of the state via dynastic claims. A dynastic claim was a territorial claim held on a land mass such as a duchy or county. These claims could be acquired through marriage or written agreement. In either situation the claim could be acted on if the territorial ruling family died out or no male heir was born.

The Hohenzollerns used their various claims to help expand the Prussian state steadily throughout the early modern era. As dedicated rulers, the Hohenzollerns were more austere than many of their contemporaries. This austere style allowed them to strengthen the apparatuses of state. This devotion to the state, while not completely unique to the Hohenzollerns, was instrumental in the ultimate success of Prussia.

This devotion to the state gave rise to the the Prussian notion of the monarch serving the state versus the Bourbon or Hapsburg view that the state was there to serve the monarch. This sentiment is seen in the statement by Frederick II: "A king is the first servant and first magistrate of the state."² This notion of a duty to the state was reflected by many of the family's actions both domestic, like land clearance, and foreign, like intentional expansion only through dynastic claims. By using a combination of the territorial claims as a basis for expansion and strong alliances, the Hohenzollerns achieved a measured pace for growth by which the kingdom was able to develop into

² Noel Charles Douglas, *Forty Thousand Quotations, Prose and Poetical: Choice Extracts on History, Science, Philosophy, Religion, Literature, Etc. Selected from the Standard Authors of Ancient and Modern Times, Classified According to Subject* (New York: G. Sully and Company, 1917), Quoted from Douglas who credits the statement to Frederick II.

a great power within the European state system. The story of how the Hohenzollern rulers achieved this remarkable feat is explained here within. From the dust of the sandy soils of Brandenburg, Prussia would rise under the stewardship of one elector and three kings to to become one of Europe's great powers.³

³ C. A. Macartney, *The Habsburg and Hohenzollern: Dynasties in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (New York: Walker, 1970), a detailed source of both Hohenzollern and Hapsburg governing styles in the early modern era; Phillip G. Dwyer, *The Rise of Prussia, 1700-1830* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), Dwyer provides a good example of the Anglo-American perspective of Prussian history.

II. Historical Perspectives and a Divided Discourse

Before going on to examine the historic evidence that leads me to believe that intentional Prussian expansion was primarily due to dynastic claims, let us examine other historians interpretations of intentional Prussian expansion. To begin it is important to establish that there seems to be a couple of divides within the historiography on Prussia. These consist of a divide between Anglo-American and German historians and a second divide between pre and post World War II historiography.

The first one of these differences is the Anglo-American and German historical divide. In the Anglo-American historical works read for this paper many authors used negative concepts to describe Prussian actions. In addition, many of these same authors appeared skeptical of the stated historic accounts for Prussian actions. For example, Phillip G. Dwyer explicitly dismissed the dynastic claims of Frederick II as his motivation to invade Silesia. Dwyer wrote that he felt it was an opportunistic act and nothing more. In my research I discovered that a higher number of negative concepts were used when authors were either British or American than I did when the author was German. Examples of these concepts included militarism, intolerance, authoritarianism, and so on. In contrast, German authors discussing the same material seldom mentioned these concepts and instead, took concepts like dynastic claims as serious motivation for the actions of the Hohenzollerns. The nature of this divide raises questions about the impartiality of the various authors. While differences in opinions should be expected within the discord community, a good historian should ask why the differences exist and where do they arise from. This brings me to the second divide. That is a divide between a pre and post-World War II narratives.

This pre and post World War II divide is a far sharper divide and has caused me to question the value of Anglo-American historical works in the post war period. As many people are aware at the end of the Second World War the Allied Control Council abolished the Prussia state. In doing so

it laid the blame for the war on Prussian culture stating that "The Prussian State which from early days [was the] bearer of militarism and reaction in Germany"⁴ is "together with its central government and all its agencies abolished."⁵ With this single statement, Prussia the state and Prussian culture were blamed for the rise of Nazism and everything associated with it.

The effect on the historical narrative was quite dramatic. Prewar Anglo-American historiographers like William Reddaway wrote in his book *Frederick the Great and the Rise of Prussia* written in 1904 that dynastic claims and diplomatic agreements were taken as just reasons for the actions of Frederick II. There is no mention of militarism or a reactionary ruler. The king is viewed in a fair manner with the author viewing the historic events in an analytical method that is free any ingrained militarism or sense of despotic rule. Almost every book read for this paper written in the prewar period followed this even handed analytical approach. This is also seen in a number of books following 1945 including works by H. W. Koch in 1978 and F. L. Carsten in 1954; however, in more contemporary times works took on a tone and tenor that while still analytical often mirrored the Allied Control Council's statement.

Authors like Christopher Clark in his book *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947* and Otto Busch in his book *Military System and Social Life in Old Regime Prussia, 1713-1807: The Beginning of the Social Militarization of Prusso-German Society* both reflect and share the Allied Control Council's viewpoint about Prussia and it's rulers being militaristic. This view point was shared by numerous authors I examined for this work who wrote in the post-war period. This view of Prussia history, especially the early modern period, often leads to a deterministic viewpoint. The deterministic viewpoint results in false comparisons. For example, that like Adolf Hitler the Prussian kings were, hyper aggressive, and militaristic in nature. The effect that this viewpoint has on

⁴ E.J Feuchtwanger, *Prussia myth and reality* (London: Oswald Wolff, 1974), 7.

⁵ Feuchtwanger, *Prussia myth*, 7.

contemporary historical works is that it weakens analytic style and many authors discount first person accounts. As a result, I have chosen for this work to rely more heavily on older works or works coming from German authors. These sources on a whole have proven to be less interpretive and focus instead on giving a richer degree of detail regarding the dynastic claims which are the centerpiece of the paper.

Dynastic claims are the central motivation behind intentional Prussian expansion; however, in order to provide a balanced perspective here are the view points of some contemporary authors on the topic. For Philip G. Dwyer in *The Rise of Prussia 1700-1815*, the primary motivator for the territorial expansion of Prussia was the "disparate nature of 'Prussia' as a geographic political entity."⁶ To Dwyer, the geographic situation for Prussia was thus the primary motivation behind Prussian expansion. Dwyer points out that it is over one thousand miles from Memel in East Prussia to Cleves on the Rhine. Between East Prussia and Brandenburg, the heart of Hohenzollern domains, was several hundred linear miles of Royal Prussia under the nominal control of the king of Poland and capped off by the great hanseatic city of Danzig. Between Brandenburg and the Rhine territories of Cleves, Ravensberg, and the county of Mark were the duchies of Hanover and Brunswick. This put almost as much distance between the ruler's western territories as their eastern.⁷ Dwyer's point is reinforced by an additional geographic reality facing Prussia's rulers and that is "Prussia's position in the middle of Europe, surrounded on all sides by potentially hostile and more powerful neighbors, placed it in an extremely vulnerable position."⁸

This point of view about Prussia as a vulnerable state was shared by Christopher Clark in *Iron Kingdom* when he states "it was an assemblage of disparate territorial fragments lacking natural

⁶ Dwyer, *Rise of Prussia*, 4.

⁷ Dwyer, *Rise of Prussia*, 4.

⁸ Dwyer, *Rise of Prussia*, 16.

boundaries."⁹ This fact cannot be easily disputed. Prussia simply did not have a safe natural or political border on which it could rest easy. To the north was Sweden. To the east lay the vast Polish Lithuanian kingdom. To the west of Prussia was Bourbon France and to the south Hapsburg Austria. Directly bordering Prussia were numerous smaller states of the Holy Roman Empire with various degrees of enmity. Nor did nature provide terrain to improve its long and very exposed borders. In a momentary glance at a topographic map of Prussia, one can see that all of its lands lay on the broad flat Northern European plain. This plain was bisected by slow-moving rivers that were reasonably easy to ford. Unlike Austria with its high mountain peaks and narrow passes no such barrier existed north or the Erz Mountains range. Thus Prussia had to protect itself as best it could.¹⁰

Adding to Dwyer's disparate nature theory about Prussia were his observations regarding its government. Dwyer points out that "Monarchical authority was difficult ¹¹ and that "local elites were largely Lutherans who were jealous of protecting their privileges."¹² These problems were compounded by an "administration [that] was largely Calvinist and its bureaucrats were often of Dutch and French origin."¹³ This rift between the Elector and the Junkers, Dwyer suggests, made the government weak at home and was reflected the outcome of the Thirty Years War. To Dwyer,

⁹ Christopher M. Clark, *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia, 1600-1947* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), XVI.

¹⁰ Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, Clark explains Prussian dysfunction as an outgrowth of it's geography.

¹¹ Dwyer, *Rise of Prussia*, 4.

¹² Dwyer, *Rise of Prussia* 5.

¹³ Dwyer, *Rise of Prussia* 5.

Prussia's dysfunctional government combined with the scattered nature of the kingdom's territories left its rulers desperate, aggressive, and expansionistic.¹⁴

On its face, the thesis that Dwyer puts forward is reasonable. There were certainly difficulties confronting Prussia including strife between Lutheran Junkers and the Calvinist kings. The distances involved in communication between various parts of the kingdom were difficult. There can be little doubt that religious tensions at times did arise between rulers and their subjects, as it had throughout Europe during the 16th and 17th century. That being said, any of the difficulties that Prussia faced were shared by other states across Europe. France had difficulties with Huguenots, England with Catholics and Parliamentarians, Austria with Bohemian Protestants and strong Hungarian nobles and Poland had strong nobles, Cossack rebels, and weak central rule. No state lacked its fair share of problems. Only Sweden in 1648 appeared to be largely problem free, but this view would be short sighted as an aggressive new state, Romanov Russia, would soon challenge Swedish power in the eastern Baltic. Indeed while Prussia's ills were many, they could be managed. Dwyer's theory about the desperate plight of the Hohenzollerns and the Prussia state was not a historic reality. While the Prussian state at the close of the Thirty Years War was in bad shape, by the time of Frederick I the kingdom was on a sound domestic footing and ready to begin acting on the outstanding dynastic claims it possessed in Pomerania, Silesia, West Prussia, along the Rhine, and in East Frisia.

Another theory asserted by Dwyer and other historians of Prussian history is that of an ingrained Prussian militarism. This is a post-World War II theory that represents an unabashed case of presentism. The idea is that Prussia was constantly on the lookout for opportunities to aggressively expand at the expense of neighboring states. While this notion seems to be borne out on occasions like, the invasion of Silesia, to apply a blanket militaristic expansion theory to every

¹⁴ Dwyer, *Rise of Prussia*, Dwyer explains Prussian expansion through his desperate nature theory.

action of the Hohenzollern dynasty is to ignore the dynastic claims they held. The notion of an ingrained Prussian militarism was first given serious validity by the British historians who helped to influence the passage of Law #46 on February 27, 1947 at the Allied Control Council, which dissolved the Prussian state. From this time forward the theory of Prussian militarism was given credence and has been reinforced by historians like Dwyer ever since.¹⁵

Dwyer's view of Prussian militarism is summed up nicely by this passage: "As for the smaller states like Saxony, Polish Prussia, Swedish Pomerania, Mecklenburg, and to a lesser extent Hannover; Frederick II and his successors coveted them with a frankness that justified other state's mistrust and hostility towards Prussia."¹⁶ While this view may have been true in the case of Swedish Pomerania and Royal Prussia because of historic claims held by the Hohenzollerns, the same claims have no validity in Hannover, Mecklenburg, or Saxony. Prussia never invaded Mecklenburg in the 17th and 18th century. Hannover, which was in a personal union with Great Britain and allied with Austria during the 1st and 2nd Silesian Wars, was not annexed until the Austro-Prussian war of 1866. As for Saxony, it had the unenviable situation of being geographically located between Austria and Prussia. During the time of elector Frederick William Saxony was a loyal friend and fellow member of the Protestant League of German princely states. These bonds of religious unity gradually were severed and were finally broken with the conversion of the Saxon Duke Frederick Augustus II to Catholicism. The break was deepened by his dual role as Duke of Saxony and King of Poland which made him a dangerous threat to Prussia. From 1740 onward, Saxony, despite being an ally of Austria and repeatedly occupied by Prussia during war time, remained a free state. It was

¹⁵ Gordon Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), Gordon provides insight into the connections between the Prussian army and how that influenced the rise of militarism within the Prussian State; Dwyer, *Rise of Prussia*, Dwyer uses the militarism theory to explain Prussian expansion; Reddaway, *Frederick the Great and the Rise of Prussia* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1904), Reddaway examines the role of militarism in the expansion plans of Frederick II.

¹⁶ Dwyer, *Rise of Prussia*, 8.

not until the defeat of Saxony in 1866 that the loyalties of the Saxons switched from Austria to Prussia. Throughout repeated occupations Prussia never moved to annex Saxony, but rather, Prussia was content to keep it from aiding its enemies.¹⁷

Christopher Clark, author of *Iron Kingdom*, shares many of Dwyer's presentist views. In his book militarism is a central reoccurring theme. According to his book's opening chapter for example, Prussia and its aristocratic leadership followed "a political culture marked by illiberalism and intolerance, an inclination to revere power over legally grounded right, and an unbroken tradition of militarism."¹⁸ Clark in this blanket statement is asserting that the Junkers, the monarchy, and Prussia itself were in essence an early form of Nazi totalitarianism. While Clark later goes on to say that "I have thus made no attempt to tease out the virtue and vice in the Prussian record,"¹⁹ the passage quoted earlier reveals a historian contradicting himself and falling in line with many scholars in the Anglo-American school of thought and believing that Prussia was the source of Nazism.

The problem for Clark, like Dwyer, is that the historical facts don't support the views which their books espouse. The idea of an inclination to revere power over legally ground right is hard to maintain in light of the fact that the under Frederick the Great, the "Corporis Juris Fridericiani"²⁰ or Frederician Code of Laws were written and then a more comprehensive set the, "Allgemeines Gesetzbuch für die Preußischen Staaten"²¹ or General Law Codes of the Prussian States, were passed in 1794. The concept of "illiberalism" as Clark phases it, comes across as a presentist

¹⁷ Reddaway, *Frederick the Great*, Reddaway explains in detail the relationship between Saxony and Prussia and the changes that developed over the 17th and 18th century; Dwyer, *Rise of Prussia*, Dwyer gives his interpretation of Prussian relations with surrounding states.

¹⁸ Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, XIII.

¹⁹ Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, XVI.

²⁰ Reddaway, *Frederick the Great*, 137.

²¹ Reddaway, *Frederick the Great*, 137.

viewpoint, one that contemporaries of Frederick II would disagree with. To states like France and Great Britain the establishment of a unified law code was seen as the sign of a progressive and modern state by 18th century standards.²²

Clark's mention of Prussia as an intolerant state also does not match up with the historic facts regarding either its policies towards minorities or religion. Prussia was a religiously tolerant state though most of its history and the kings and electors used a mix of Catholic and Protestant officials in key positions of government. Prussia was a religious safe haven for Anabaptists, Calvinists, and despite earlier opposition to Catholicism even Catholic Jesuits. It was the kings of Prussia who began settling Jews on royal lands and later Jews were allowed to settle throughout the kingdom following the 1812 Jewish emancipation act. Not only were religious groups tolerated, but so were ethnic groups. Poles, Swedes, and Czechs, Lithuanians were all welcome under the Prussian banner. Militarily this toleration extended further as recruits from across the continent were welcomed. To the Hohenzollerns, religion and ethnicity mattered less than loyalty to the state. This supports the opposite view of Prussia as a tolerant state. Clark's views reflect what he perceives as the negative influences of Prussia on Germany as a whole.²³

The fact that both Clark and Dwyer mention militarism in describing Prussia shows that they both believe the militaristic Prussia theory and are willing to perpetuate the idea in their own writings. The evidence I have stated contradicts ideas of intolerance and illiberalism. Also, the

²² H. W. Koch, *A History of Prussia*. (London: Longman, 1978), Koch describes Prussia as a non-aggressive state and provides evidence to support this view.

²³ Reinhold August Dorwart. *The Administrative Reforms of Frederick William I of Prussia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), Dorwart discusses the inclusive nature of Prussian Government and how Frederick William I valued skill over social distinctions; Craig, *The Politics*, Craig discusses inclusiveness in Prussian Army, Otto Busch, *Military System and Social Life in Old Regime Prussia, 1713-1807: The Beginning of the Social Militarization of Prusso-German Society* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1997) Busch provides insight into the bonds between the military and society in Prussia.

military build up cited by both as proof of Prussian militarism ignores similar military build ups in other states like France and Austria in the period of 1640 to 1789. Prussia was not a militaristic expansionist state, as described by Clark and Dwyer. Instead, Prussia was a defensive state that had close social bonds between the state, military, people, and aristocratic leadership. The reality is that between 1648 and 1740 all-but one war Prussia was involved in was started by another state. Prussia was drawn into these wars through an alliance held with a belligerent, not as the aggressor.²⁴

While the actions of Frederick II can be seen as aggressive it is important to remember that it was Austria that started the First Silesian War. Frederick II was within his right to assert his claims over Silesia when a woman, Maria Theresa, took the Austrian throne. Under the rules of dynastic claims a woman could not assert a dynastic claim over a man. So when Charles VI died without a son, Frederick II was within his right to occupy Silesia. The Second Silesian War saw Frederick II supporting his French ally. It was only during the Third Silesian War that Frederick II can be seen as aggressive. He began the war under the false belief that Russia and Austria were about to invade and acted to preempt the invasion.²⁵

Frederick's occupation of lower Silesia in 1740 was founded on his dynastic claims not a militaristic desire to expand. Reddaway suggests that Frederick II would have been content with only the territories for which Prussia held a dynastic claim, but Maria Theresa chose to start a war rather than relinquish ownership. Similar actions had been taken by France west of the Rhine and by Austria in Hungary and northern Italy, but these actions do tend to get labeled as militaristic or aggressive by historians. Prussian expansion was primarily through the dynastic claims process as

²⁴ Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, Clark's support of Prussia as a militaristic state; Dwyer, *Rise of Prussia*, Dwyer's support of Prussia as a militaristic state; Jeremy Black, *European International Relations*, Black gives an account of wars Prussia was involved in and how they were drawn in.

²⁵ Reddaway, *Frederick the Great*, Reddaway gives an account for why Frederick II gets into all three Silesian wars.

was seen in 1618 in Ducal Prussia and in 1609 in the Rhineland. It asserted claims to lands that through dubious means other nations had denied to it or claimed as their own using trumped up claims. Thus, denying those lands to the Hohenzollern rulers whom through carefully arranged marriages and political arrangements had set them up to inherit.²⁶

Both Dwyer's and Clark's assumptions about "the desperate nature of Prussia" and its aggressive policies are based on a post-World War Two narrative not historical facts. This raises questions about their conclusions. While some conclusions made by Clark and Dwyer have validity, I assert that many more are questionable. Both authors' books support the post-World War II militaristic theme of Prussia. This militaristic narrative is largely absent in pre-war sources used for this paper. This split between pre- and post-war historiography helps to explain why Dwyer rather than taking the claims on Silesia as a serious cause for Frederick II invasion instead writes them off as "sheer opportunism."²⁷ In contrast to Clark and Dwyer, earlier authors point to Prussia in the early modern era as an enlightened state led by tolerant though absolutist rulers who looked to provide for welfare of their people through improved services like the post and grain stores. This ensured food in times of dearth and war and improved communication throughout Prussia. Furthermore under Frederick II land was cleared and thousands of hectares were brought under cultivation. Prussia was not a despotic militaristic state, but rather, an enlightened monarchy that looked out for the good of its people with grain stores, new farmland for settlement, and maintained a strong army to prevent plundering similar to what had occurred during the Thirty Years War. Now that we have

²⁶ Black, *European International Relations*, Black writes about wars in which both Austria and France expand; Ferdinand Schevill, *The Great Elector* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947), 40-45, Schevill explains how Prussia acquired Ducal Prussia and Rhine territories along with claims on Silesia.

²⁷ Dwyer, *Rise of Prussia*, 16

examined what some modern historians have written about Prussian expansion let us examine the roots of Prussia with a review of how it acquired its lands prior to 1640.²⁸

²⁸ David Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature: Water, Landscape, and the Making of Modern Germany* (New York City: Norton, 2006), Blackbourn is a good source for information about the land improvements made in Prussia under Frederick II; Thomas Carlyle. "History of Friedrich II of Prussia, Called Frederick the Great" (London: Chapman & Hall, 1858; Project Gutenberg, 2008) www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/25808, accessed February 23, 2015, Carlyle is an 19th century source that shows that the concept of dynastic claims were commonly used in the early modern period and that concepts like militarism and the desperate state theory were largely late 20th century concepts; Dorwart, *The Administrative Reforms*, Dorwart is a great source for government projects that improved Prussian civilian services.

III. Brandenburg to Prussia

The kingdom of Prussia began in 1701. Prior to that time the Hohenzollern domains were broken up into three pieces. The first region to be controlled by the dynasty was Brandenburg. Brandenburg consisted of six marches the Neumark, Mittelmark, Uckermark, Kurmark, Altmark, and Prignitz. Brandenburg had once been a region occupied by Slavs, but due to increasing population growth west of the Elbe River beginning around 1000 CE., a large eastward migration of German speaking people began to settle into the region. Through cultural assimilation, immigration, and warfare the region was culturally German by the beginning of Hohenzollern rule in 1413. In 1415 John Sigismund, the first Hohenzollern margrave of Brandenburg, paid 400,000 golden gulden to the emperor to become an imperial elector of the Holy Roman Empire. This increased the importance of the province within the imperial system and raised the Hohenzollerns stature among the members of the empire. This strengthened its position and improved claims to Pomerania. The influence that the dynasty acquired along with the revenues generated by the peasants and Junkers alike allowed for a slow, but steadily improving state in the 15th and 16th century. This made relations with the Hohenzollerns more appealing and through a series of marriages a large number of dynastic claims developed which gave rise to opportunities to expand territorially.²⁹

Several hundred miles west of Brandenburg and the Hohenzollern power base were the Rhenish territories of Ravensberg, the county of Mark, and Cleves. This collection of territories stretched discontinuously from Ravensberg on the Weser River in the east in a horse shoe shape with the Mark in the center and finishing west in Cleves on the Rhine. The Rhenish territories proved to be the first major expansion of Hohenzollern territory. The territory was acquired through Anne of Prussia when Duke John William of Julich died in March 1609. Electress Anne was next in

²⁹ Koch, *A History of Prussia*, Koch is a good source for the founding of Brandenburg Prussia.

the line of succession and Brandenburg formally took possession of Julich-Cleves-Berg. The Hapsburg Catholic emperor refused to see a Protestant ruling over the Catholic population of Cleves and Berg and backed the far weaker Neuberg family claim to the duchy. In a short war these both Cleves and Berg were dispossessed from the Hohenzollerns in Peace Treaty of Xanten in 1614. This province would be one of two provinces delivered to the Hohenzollerns through the marriage of John Sigismund and Anne of Prussia.³⁰

The last province acquired in Prussian history prior to the Thirty Years War was Ducal Prussia, known in modern times as East Prussia. Ducal Prussia was a large sickle-shaped province surrounding Ermland on the southeast Baltic. The population of Ducal Prussia was a mix of Poles, Slavic Prussians, Lithuanians, and Germans. The Germans had immigrated into the region while it was under the control of the Teutonic Order. The Teutonic Order's subsequent defeat in the Thirteen Years War meant it lost control of Royal Prussia and Ermland. In 1525 Headmaster Albert converted to the Lutheranism and the lands of Teutonic Order became Ducal Prussia. From 1525 on Ducal Prussia was a fief of Poland. In 1611 in the Treaty of Warsaw the aging and still heirless Albert Frederick had John Sigismund Hohenzollern, his son in law, named heir. This was achieved through Albert Frederick's daughter's marriage to the Elector. Anne of Prussia thus brought through her mother the provinces of Cleves and the counties of Mark and Ravensberg, but also Ducal Prussia when her father died in 1618 on the eve of the Thirty Years War and Ducal Prussia proved to be the key to Hohenzollern ambitions. With Ducal Prussia came a territory outside of the Holy

³⁰ A. W. Ward. *The Empire under Rudolf II*. Chapter XXI in *Cambridge Modern History Volume 3*, (London:Macmillan & Company, 1918), 715; Koch, *A History of Prussia*. Koch is a good source on the Julich-Cleves-Berg claim.

Roman Empire and from his territory the hopes of the Hohenzollerns to rise from an electorship to one of God's anointed kings could be achieved.³¹

³¹ Schevill, *The Great Elector*, 40-45, Schevill is a good source for the history of Ducal Prussia; Karin Friedrich, *The Other Prussia: Royal Prussia, Poland, and Liberty, 1569-1772* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), Friedrich was a source on the Teutonic Knights and the loss of Ermland and Royal Prussia.

IV. The the International Norms of the 17th and 18th Century

Any understanding of Prussia and its expansion through dynastic claims in the early modern period should take religion into account. While none of the claims were purely religious in nature the actions of the Hapsburg emperors to stall, split, or deny Hohenzollern claims often were. This is first seen in the Berg, Julich, Cleves claims. In these duchies half the population were Catholic and half were Lutheran. Under Treaty of Augsburg the religion of the ruler dictated the religion of their subjects so the prospect of a Protestant elector ruling over Catholic subjects was enough to inspire Emperor Rudolph II to support the House of Neuburg a co-claimant. The result was a split of the inheritance with Berg and Julich going to Neuburg. The population of Brandenburg, the home province of Prussia, converted to Lutheranism along with its Hohenzollern rulers shortly after the Protestant Reformation began. While Elector Joachim II managed to stay out of the religious wars of the 16th century through the wise decision to hide his conversion to Lutheranism, his fellow elector the duke of Saxony was not so fortunate. The Duke of Saxony took the brunt of the fighting when the crusading Charles V invaded. However, a century later Brandenburg would not be so lucky when both imperial and Swedish armies invaded the electorate during the Thirty Years War.³²

The cause of this invasion was the movement of the Hohenzollerns from the Lutheran faith to the more austere Reformed faith. This would cause a split in the Protestant Union between Reformed and Lutheran churches. This gave the Catholic Emperor Ferdinand II the opportunity to cleanse the empire of Protestants. The split between the two branches of the Protestant faith weakened the position of both. As tensions rose in the Holy Roman Empire war broke out and for a second time in a century the Empire was aflame in religious war. The Thirty Years War was the last

³² Schevill, *The Great Elector*, 45-97 Schevill is an excellent source for understanding the religious makeup of Prussia

great religious war in the empire and the most destructive. According to Elizabeth Stone, "it took nearly two hundred years for the damage done in the Empire to be repaired."³³

After the war the Hohenzollerns learned a valuable lesson and they never moved to repress religious freedom in their domains. The result was that Prussia became a refuge for repressed Protestants across Europe and was seen as tolerant towards Catholics especially after 1780 when Jesuits were allowed to enter Prussia as teachers and university professors after increasing hostility between the order and the Hapsburgs in Austria. This toleration made Prussia the refuge of numerous Protestants like the French Huguenots and Salzburg Protestants as well as immigrants from the Netherlands and farmers from the Palatinate. These immigrants helped stabilize the population during periods of war and following outbreaks of disease. Following the large-scale land clearance projects of Frederick II enticing people to immigrate to work the newly cleared land became a policy and the offer of religious freedom was a cornerstone this foreign policy.³⁴

Though religion played a central role in the 16th and early 17th century in Prussian foreign policy its role began to give way to dynastic, imperial, and economic considerations following the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. The Treaty of Westphalia reduced religion tensions within the Holy Roman Empire. Though tension on occasion did flare up the major parties acted to settle any issues peacefully after 1648. While the status of the Reformed Church mirrored the rights of the Lutheran Church as set down in the Treaty of Augsburg in 1555, after 1648 the issue remained a salient one. On more than one occasion Protestant princes would seek out Prussian help as it was Prussia and no longer Saxony that was seen defending Protestant liberties within the Holy Roman Empire.

³³ Elizabeth Stone, *Thirty Years War*. Lecture, Portland State University Class, Portland, October 24, 2013, Dr. Stone gave a comprehensive lecture about the entire Thirty Years War

³⁴ Blackbourn, *The Conquest of Nature*, Blackbourn's book describes in detail the foreign policy of Frederick II in regards to land clearance and population settlement; Macartney, *The Habsburg and Hohenzollern*, Macartney was a good source for information about Habsburg religious policies.

V. The Holy Roman Empire and the Internal Politics of Dynastic Claims

Hohenzollern Prussia was on the one hand an independent state and on the other hand a member of the Holy Roman Empire. As a member it was also seen as a fief by the emperor; however, this point of view was not shared by Prussia or many of the member states. There was no king in Prussia in 1640 at the ascension of the Elector Frederick William. When Frederick William became head of state his titles were margrave of Brandenburg, duke of Prussia, duke of Cleves, and most importantly elector of the Holy Roman Empire. As a member of the Holy Roman Empire the Hohenzollern Prussia enjoined both its benefits and its pitfalls.

To understand my view of the function of dynastic claims it is important to have a strong understanding of dynastic claims within the Holy Roman Empire. The empire had one elected Emperor who was in turn selected by seven electors of which Brandenburg was one. This gave these seven states considerable influence within the Empire. This influence was particularly important when dynastic claims were involved. The prospective emperor in order to get the necessary votes to be elected as the next emperor often had to recognize claims, pay hefty sums of money, or promise marriages to the various electors. This political quid pro quo ensured that these electors saw their interests furthered and the emperor continued to receive the benefit of the military assets of the empire as well the prestige that the title brought.³⁵

While the exchange of monies for votes often was the preferred method of securing the three archbishops votes in Cologne, Mainz, and Trier because they seldom held dynastic claims or required marriages, acquiring the votes of the four secular states were more difficult. The kingdom of Bohemia had come under Hapsburg rule in 1526 following the death of King Louis II at the Battle of Mohacs. This is an example of how dynastic claims worked outside of the Hohenzollern

³⁵ John G. Gagliardo, *Germany under the Old Regime, 1600-1790* (London: Longman, 1991), Gagliardo was a good source for information about the Holy Roman Empire.

context. When Louis II died at Mohacs he had no heir. To prevent a succession crisis he had arranged that in the event of his untimely death his lands would pass to the House of Hapsburg under Ferdinand I. Thus the kingdom of Hungary and Bohemia and Bohemia's vote as an elector came under Hapsburg control.³⁶

During the time period of 1640 to 1786 all but one Holy Roman Emperor were Hapsburg. I will assume from here that the Bohemian vote was secured. The remaining three secular electors of Saxony, the Palatinate, and Brandenburg each at various times took monies or secured marriages with the imperial family for votes. However, for the Hohenzollerns the primary focus for their vote was recognition of dynastic claims. While Saxony had few territorial or dynastic claims, both the Palatinate and Prussia did. These two states both frequently held claims on a variety of territories and so the recognition of these claims was central to their states aims. For the Hohenzollerns recognition of territorial or dynastic claims became frequent after 1614 when the fruits of the marriage with Anne of Prussia began to be harvested. She would in one generation nearly triple the size of Hohenzollern lands. This began a process that was to continue for the next 150 years in Magdeburg, Halberstadt, Lingen, Pomerania, Hohenstein, Tecklenburg, East Frisia, Royal Prussia, and Silesia. It would be the claims to these lands that would build up the Prussian power base.³⁷

The framework of the Empire with its right to inherit duchies, bishoprics, counties, and other territories gave member states like Prussia the right through dynastic and hereditary claims to inherit territory. This was largely unique in a monarchical state to state process outside of the Holy

³⁶ Macartney, *The Habsburg and Hohenzollern*, 197; Teich, Mikulas. *Bohemia in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) Mikulas is a good source for information about Bohemia and King Louis II.

³⁷ Schevill, *The Great Elector*, 40-52, Schevill provides information about the dynastic claims and Anne of Prussia's importance to the first two.

Roman Empire. For example, in England a duke or earl could inherit land, but the earl of Warwick could not leave his land to the king of Scotland. In the Holy Roman Empire each ruler could act independently including inheriting another state to enlarge his own. It was through this system that Prussia followed during the 17th and 18th centuries that the state expanded. By having a tradition of expansion through the two varieties of claims, Prussia along with other growing states like Hanover and Bavaria in the empire would continue to grow and consolidate their power until the the Holy Roman Empire ended in 1806.³⁸

³⁸ Gagliardo, *Germany under*, Gagliardo was a good source for information about inheritance within the Holy Roman Empire; Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, Clark wrote about the end of the Holy Roman Empire.

VI. International Norms of the Early Modern Era and the Relationship of Dynastic Claims

The Holy Roman Empire was a part of the continental system of the pre-Napoleonic period. The rules that governed international relations have changed dramatically since the 18th century. Today ideas of states and territory being swapped, traded, annexed, or inherited are notions that are uncommon or entirely unfamiliar. While we may recognize inheritance it is in the context of family or personal property not whole regions with millions of inhabitants. Annexation of land has been all but eliminated as an acceptable result of war and peace negotiations. While these methods are uncommon within the modern rules of international relations exceptions do occur. The most recent example is Russia's annexation of the Crimea from the Ukraine. For a modern nation to swap land much less annex an independent state in order to provide compensation to two other states in a peace treaty is unlikely. This; however, is just what occurred in 1648 with regards to Pomerania between Sweden and Prussia and again in 1783 in the first Partition of Poland between Russia, Austria, and Prussia. More recently it occurred with Germany first during the Versailles Peace Treaty and again during the Potsdam Treaty.³⁹

While ideas like territorial annexation, territorial exchanges, and reducing independent states to fiefs are ideas that are foreign ideas to the modern observer, according to Jeremy Black, author of *European International Relations, 1648-1815*, all of the practices would be considered normal and used by most states in the 17th and 18th century. In Frederick II's 1768 testament he writes about land exchanges that: "This acquisition [Swedish Pomerania] could only be made by treaties."⁴⁰ He goes on

³⁹ Black, *European International Relations*, Black is a great source for information about the early modern periods international norms.

⁴⁰ "Political Testament of Frederick II ('the Great') (1768)," at German Historical Institute, German History in Documents and Images, germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.chf?document_id=3542, accessed February 2, 2015, 5.

to say that, the best plan is to draw Sweden into a war with Russia to recover Livonia. In exchange for Prussian help, Sweden would "cede[d] Prussia the part of Pomerania that lies north the Preene." This shows how this type of land exchange was viewed in the 18th century context. A century earlier the emperor gave Minden and Ravenstein to Prussia and promised that when the current bishops of Halberstadt and Magdenburg died Prussia would inherit these secularized bishoprics as well. This was compensation for the loss of Western Pomerania which the Swedish demanded under the terms of the Treaty of Westphalia. Jeremy Black remarks that land exchanges of this nature were not unique to the Treaty of Westphalia and that "Augustus II of Saxony-Poland proposed an exchange of territory in order to obtain a direct territorial link between Saxony and Poland though Silesia."⁴¹ As we can see the exchange of land was common both during peace time and as a condition of a treaty such as the Westphalia Treaty.

The most salient of the international motives for us was the use of dynastic claims. While other matters such as religion or trade did arise on occasion, the dynasty's primary interests were its dynastic claims. These claims were the driving force behind Prussian foreign policy. Dynastic claims can be broken into two primary categories. First, and by far the most widely used, were hereditary claims. These claims arose through the marriage between families who were head of states. A dynastic claim came about when a ruler died without a male heir. When this occurred the territory could be claimed by husbands of the surviving female heirs. If no rival claims came forward the lands could be merged into the existing state as inheritance of the wife and thus passed down to her male heirs. The use of this political device was so common that its importance can scarcely be understated. Hereditary claims allowed for the creation of the United Kingdom under the Stewarts. Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella of Castile and Leon through marriage created modern Spain,

⁴¹ Black, *European International*, 17.

but for us it is Anne of Prussia and John Sigismund's marriage that was the foundational moment. It was the addition of Ducal Prussia that gave the Hohenzollerns the opportunity to rise from margrave and elector to King.⁴²

The second type of dynastic claim is through the last will and testament of a ruler. If a ruler died without a son and no clear claimant existed he could will his state to another ruler. The obvious problem with this is that other rulers may challenge the will and claim the territory on other grounds. These types of claims often had to be settled through force of arms as was the case in Pomerania. Here the treaty of 1468 between the two families called for the passing of the dukedom to the Hohenzollerns in the event that the line failed. This is exactly what happened to Bogislav XIV in 1637. With his death Prussia claimed the dukedom in accordance with the agreement, but the wife of Bogislav XIV was the sister of the King of Sweden and as such the Swedish King claimed the Pomerania based on a hereditary claim. The dukedom was subsequently divided in the Westphalia Treaty. While far less common these treaties proved to be a valuable base from which to launch a claim.⁴³

These dynastic claims were the general rules of by which every nation in the 17th and 18th century expanded territorially. It was expected any state looking to annex a territory should have a dynastic claim on that land. States that did not have a dynastic claim and willfully ignored any pretense of having one risked becoming the target of a coalition opposed to its territorial ambitions. This was the case with Louis XIV. After aggressive and unprovoked wars against the Spanish Netherlands he was finally stopped from expanding the power of the Bourbons during the War of Spanish Succession. This was also seen against Frederick the Great in the Third Silesian War. The

⁴² Koch, *A History of Prussia*, Koch is a good source for information about early 17th century Prussia and the dynastic claims of Anne of Prussia.

⁴³ F. L. Carsten, *The Origins of Prussia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), Carsten is a good source for the early history of Brandenburg and Pomerania.

king was seen as overly aggressive and the conquest of all of Silesia and not just the five counties and duchies that he had a claim to in the First Silesian War made him look aggressive in the eyes of his neighbors. While those two wars are good examples of what happens when a nation expanded without a dynastic claim, it was not by any measure a sure thing that a coalition would form. It depended on the politics of the time and the state under attack. If two great powers like Hapsburg Austria and the Ottoman Empire went to war it was considered an even fight and seldom did other combatants participate without a territorial or monetary reward. If the state being invaded was militarily weak and perceived to be the helpless victim of an aggressive state frequently a coalition that would intervene to protect its interest or to prevent the aggressive state from becoming stronger. These coalitions might be based on religion, trade interest, or preexisting alliances. Whatever the situation the Machiavellian idea of the aggressive prince was seldom tolerated.⁴⁴

The rules of international relations were such that no nation was allowed to become so powerful that it could freely threaten everyone else. This balance of power was maintained, adjusted and decreased as conditions changed. Powerful states like Poland and Sweden both of whom held vast diplomatic and military sway in the 17th century, would fade or be totally destroyed by the close of the 18th. Likewise new powers rose like Prussia and the Dutch Republic. The changing nature of the balance of power ensured safety for all by power for none. With rules of the international affairs now laid out let us now look at the the dynastic claims that would drive the Hohenzollerns from the brink of ruin to the heights of power.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Black, *European International*, Black is a good source for information about coalitions and dynastic claims.

⁴⁵ Black, *European International*, Black is an excellent source for information about the European balance of power in the 17th and 18th centuries.

VII. The House of Hohenzollern and the Foundations of Prussian Dynastic

Claims

Hohenzollern Prussia's foreign policy was driven primarily by five dynastic claims on: Pomerania, Silesia, Royal Prussia, Jülich-Cleves-Berg and East Frisia. Each claim derived from a unique source and no two were alike. To understand the action of Prussia's rulers between 1640 and 1786 it is fundamental to understand each claim as they would influence the foreign policy choices each ruler made.

The oldest of the five claims was the Pomeranian. The claim to Pomerania was very complex and overlapped the second claim to Royal Prussia. Brandenburg's claims to Pomerania extended back before the time of the Hohenzollerns to the era of the House of Ascania. The claims of the Ascanian kings were a combination of hereditary and feudal. Pomerania prior to 1305 stretched from the Vistula River in the east to north of the Peene River near Greifswald. It included Danzig, Kolberg, Stettin and numerous smaller towns and cities. During the time of the Ascanian margraves Pomerania was a direct fief of Brandenburg as granted by the Emperor Frederick II. This was subsequently reinforced by a series of treaties in the mid 14th century. In 1309 Waldemar the Great of Brandenburg moved to occupy Danzig and eastern Pomerania but he failed when the Teutonic Order intervened on behalf of the Polish king. Waldemar was subsequently defeated and was forced to relinquish his claims on the region for 10,000 silver marks in the Treaty of Soldin of 1309. In return the Teutonic Order received the claim and rapidly declared that the region was no longer Pomerania, but instead western Prussia and part of the order's domains. Eleven years after the Treaty of Soldin in 1320 Waldemar died childless and the Ascanian line in Brandenburg ended.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Carlyle, *HISTORY OF FRIEDRICH II*, Carlyle is a good source for information about the Pomeranian claim; Carsten, *Origins of Prussia*, Carsten is a good source for the early history of Pomerania and the Hohenzollern relations.

When the Hohenzollerns became the new margraves of Brandenburg they wasted no time in asserting their rights over Pomerania. By this 1415 the Duchy of Pomerania was broken into three parts, the eastern half stretched east from the Oder River to the Polish border. The second part controlled Stettin and the Oder River mouth with the last section west of the Oder River and centered on the Peene River. Each region was ruled by a separate duke. In 1466 the last heir of the Stettin line died and the margrave Frederick II of Brandenburg stepped in to annex the territory based on the old Ascanian claims to Pomerania as a fief. The remaining two dukes, in order to avoid a major war with a superior enemy, offered a compromise and agreed that all of Pomerania would be a fief of Brandenburg and in exchange the dukes took direct control over the Stettin duchy. This was agreed to and in Second Treaty of Soldin 1466 it was formalized. Despite the signing of the treaty the Hapsburg Emperor took exception to the status of Pomerania as a fief of Brandenburg. The emperor viewed fiefs as something only the emperor could have within the Holy Roman Empire and he attempted to nullify the treaty. This action led to years of conflict between the dukes of Pomerania and the emperor on one side and the margrave of Brandenburg on the other. The final result was that the original treaty conditions stood.⁴⁷

With the treaty in place the Hohenzollerns were in a position to inherit all of Pomerania and had to bide their time and wait for the remaining family lines to die out. This is precisely what finally occurred in 1637 when Bogislaw XIV died without an heir. Because Pomerania was under occupation by Swedish forces and the fact that Bogislaw's wife was the sister of the king of Sweden, Bogislaw's death prompted a dispute between the House of Vasa and Hohenzollern. The dispute arose because the Swedish king claimed the dukedom based on the status of his sister as wife of Bogislaw XIV and the Hohenzollerns, based their claim to Pomerania on the fact the the land was a

⁴⁷ Carlyle, *HISTORY OF FRIEDRICH II*, Carlyle is a good source for information about the Pomeranian claim; Carsten, *Origins of Prussia*, Carsten is a good source for the early history of Pomerania and the Hohenzollern relations.

fief of Brandenburg and thus was already Hohenzollern land. This claim would be partially settled at Westphalia, but neither claimant renounced their rights to the whole duchy.⁴⁸

Closely tied to the Pomeranian claim was Royal Prussia. The claim to Royal Prussian was based on two distinct lineages. The stronger claim came from the inherited rights to West Prussia through Duke Albert of Prussia and subsequently his daughter Anne of Prussia, the wife of John Sigismund. Duke Albert never surrendered his rights to West Prussia or Ermland and when Ducal Prussia passed to the Hohenzollerns this claims came as part of the complete Prussian inheritance. The reason for the validity of this point is that when Waldemar the Great sold his claim to the Teutonic Order it alone had right to the territory. The subsequent occupation of West Prussia by the Polish monarchy in 1466 and the creation of Royal Prussia did not change the fact that the Teutonic Order only had a legal right to it. After 1525 when the Order's leadership in Prussia converted to Lutheranism and established the duchy of Prussia, Duke Albert of Prussia inherited of the Order's secularized land claims which included Royal Prussia and Ermland.⁴⁹

The second claim gave the Hohenzollerns the right to West Prussia under the old Pomeranian rights of Waldemar of Brandenburg. The basis of this was that when the Teutonic Order ceded West Prussia to Poland the right to claim the province reverted back to the margrave of Brandenburg. This claim came with a number of problems for the Hohenzollerns, however. First, margrave's rights had been sold to the Teutonic Order for the 10,000 silver marks and thus were no longer his to claim. Second, the claim belonged to another house, the Ascanian, not to whomever was the the Margrave of Brandenburg. Thus the use of this was dubious at best; however, after 1618 and the inheritance of Ducal Prussia the claims became stronger. With Anne of Prussia came not

⁴⁸ Schevill, *Great Elector*, 51, Schevill provides good information on the Pomeranian claim status after 1637.

⁴⁹ Carsten, *Origins of Prussia*, Carsten provides information about the source of the Ducal Prussia claim.

only Ducal Prussia, but through her father, Albert of Prussia, the Hohenzollerns gained a strong claim through Anne of Prussia on Royal Prussia. When this Teutonic Order derived claim was combined with the inheritance of Pomerania in 1637, the Hohenzollern claim to Royal Prussia became a formidable one. By 1640 the Hohenzollerns possessed not one, but three different sources for their claims stretching back more than three hundred years. Thus when the land was occupied in the First Partition of Poland neither Russia nor Austria had any major objections.⁵⁰

The first claim to be acted on by the Hohenzollern rulers was Jülich-Cleves-Berg. This heredity claim came to the Hohenzollerns through that most famous of Hohenzollern wives, Anne of Prussia. She was the only child of Marie Eleanor of Cleves and Duke Albert Frederick of Prussia. When she married John Sigismund he became the sole inheritor of both the Prussian duchy and the Jülich-Cleves-Berg duchy. The prospect of the Protestant Margrave of Brandenburg becoming the lord of Jülich-Cleves-Berg caused the Catholic emperor to support a rival claimant, the Count of Neuberg Palatinate. The count, Phillip Ludwig of Neuberg Palatinate, was a Catholic and married to Anne of Cleves, one of two surviving sisters of Duke William of Jülich-Cleves-Berg. Through his wife the count was able to also claim the Jülich-Cleves-Berg duchy. This gave rise to open conflict which was settled in 1614 in the Treaty of Xanten when the duchy was divided, but neither family renounced claims to the entire duchy.⁵¹

The East Frisian claim arose from the the marriage of Sophie Wilhelmine of the Ansbach House of Hohenzollern to the last prince of East Frisia. When Charles Edzard died in 1744 childless, the princely state was left with just one heir and that was the princess. As she was from the

⁵⁰ Carlyle, *HISTORY OF FRIEDRICH II*, Carlyle provides detailed information about the claims to Royal Prussia; Carsten, *Origins of Prussia*, Carsten was a good source for information about Ducal Prussia and Brandenburg relations.

⁵¹ Schevill, *Great Elector*, 42, Schevill is an excellent source for information about the dynastic claims of Berg and Jülich.

House of Hohenzollern, Frederick II was able to claim the territory as the head of the family. While the Sophie Wilhelmine claim was weak, because it was from the Ansbach House of Hohenzollern not the Brandenburg House of Hohenzollern, the claim did have merit. Frederick II also held an additional claim to East Frisia through William of Orange. When William of Orange died without an heir in 1702, Frederick II had the right to claim East Frisia through the Great Elector's wife Louise Henriette of Nassau-Orange. The House of Nassau-Orange was the family line from which Charles Edzard descended and so both Frederick I and Frederick William I both made claims to the province through the House of Nassau-Orange prior to the death of Prince Charles Edzard. The Hohenzollern claim was further supported by the emperor in exchange for service rendered to him against the Turks and as part of an agreement reached to temporarily settle the Silesia claims. When the Edzard line did finally fail in 1744, the occupation and incorporation of East Frisia into Prussia was valid and an imperially sanctioned event.⁵²

The last of the territories that Prussia's rulers claimed under dynastic rights was parts of Silesia. This claim stemmed from a couple of different sources. The five territories that made up the complete claim were Jagerdorf, Liegnitz, Wohlau, Schwiebus, and Brieg. Jagerdorf was a Silesian duchy that was ruled by a member of the Ansbach House of Hohenzollern. When the last member of the line, George Frederick, died out 1603 he bequeathed the duchy to the Margrave of Brandenburg Joachim III. This transfer; however, never took place. Instead the Hapsburg Emperor Ferdinand I claimed the duchy for his own, alleging that it was an imperial fief and as such reverted to the Emperor when George Frederick died.⁵³

⁵² Carlyle, *HISTORY OF FRIEDRICH II*, Carlyle provides a good source of information on the family relations between the Edzard line and Hohenzollerns.

⁵³ Carlyle, *HISTORY OF FRIEDRICH II*, Carlyle is a good source for the Claims on Jagerdorf.

The duchies of Brieg, Wohlau, and Liegnitz were three more territories that the Hohenzollerns claimed. According to Ferdinand Schevill, author of *The Great Elector*, the last ruler, Duke William George, of Brieg, Wohlau, and Liegnitz, bequeathed his duchies to Frederick William in his will. This claim was something that was also written about by Thomas Carlyle who explained that the family had a "Covenant to succeed reciprocally on the Failure of Heirs to either."⁵⁴ While the treaty provided the Hohenzollerns with a firm bases to take control of the duchies when the Piast line failed, the Hapsburg emperor repeated the assertions made to take control of Jagerdorf and claimed the duchies for his own after the Piast line failed.⁵⁵

Schwiebus, unlike the other four claims, was a county completely surrounded by Prussian lands. It was on the border lands between the Holy Roman Empire and Poland. The claim to the county arrived from a compromise reached by the Elector Frederick William and Emperor Leopold I. By the terms of the treaty for the remainder of the elector's lifetime he would rule Schwiebus and the emperor would rule over the remaining four disputed duchies. This prevented war and in exchange for this compromise Frederick William provided military assistance to the emperor. Following the death elector Frederick William in 1686, King Frederick I his heir reasserted the Hohenzollern claim to the other four duchies and challenged Hapsburg control of Schwiebus.⁵⁶

The number, size, scope, and different kinds of dynastic claims make it clear that Prussia had plenty of territory to act on to expand its power base, including rich trade ports like Stettin and

⁵⁴ Carlyle, *HISTORY OF FRIEDRICH II*, Carlyle describes the Piast and Hohenzollern treaty which gave rise to the claim on Brieg, Wohlau, and Liegnitz

⁵⁵ Schevill, *Great Elector*, 385-93, Schevill details the Piast Hohenzollern relationship and how it gave rise to the claim on Brieg, Wohlau, and Liegnitz.

⁵⁶ Schevill, *Great Elector*, 385-93, Schevill explains in detail the treaty that gave rise to the Schwiebus claim; Koch, *A History of Prussia*, Koch is a good source for information about the lead up to the Schwiebus claim; Carlyle, *HISTORY OF FRIEDRICH II*, Carlyle provides detailed information about the connection between the East Frisia claim and the Silesian negotiations.

Danzig and productive agricultural lands. It was important that each claim be maintained and that none of them be renounced even if the claim could not be acted on immediately. This is why despite not being able to secure all of Pomerania, Elector Frederick William stated in this political testament: "You should in no way allow yourself to be deprived or allow anything to be taken from your lands, borders, or conventional rights."⁵⁷ This passage shows that he feared that other states were seeking to weaken Prussia either by taking current territory or by depriving it of territory to which it held a claim. This view point is given voice in a later passage: "Sooner or later they will have some opportunity or be able to activate their sinister plans to diminish the house, and they will not refrain from removing it from all consideration."⁵⁸

Elector Frederick William's statement that the "conventional rights" of a ruler must be preserved means that while a claim may not be acted on in any particular year it must be guarded as closely as a border, county, or the faith of the state. Preserving the claim allowed it to be acted on when the moment was most opportune, such as when a ruling line of a claimed territory failed to produce a male heir. This failure of a family line then allowed the territory to be incorporated into the Prussian state under the pretext of the claim. This claim ensured that if a war developed over the territory, that Prussia as an instigator of the claim had what the international community viewed as a *Casus Belli*. A *Casus Belli* in the 17th and 18th century was expected by other states if a state intended to initiate a war over the claim. Therefore, having a claim such as the Pomeranian one was crucial if future actions were to be taken. This is why all five claims were publicly announced and reasserted with each new ruler until the territory was annexed into the Prussian state.

⁵⁷ "Political Testament of Frederick William ('the Great Elector') (May 19, 1667)," at German Historical Institute, German History in Documents and Images, germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.chf?document_id=3542, accessed February 2, 2015, 5.

⁵⁸ "Political Testament of Frederick William", German History in Documents and Images, accessed February 2, 2015, 5.

VIII. The Reign and Achievements of Elector Frederick William

We have established that the Hohenzollerns had five primary claims, four of which could be acted on at the onset of Elector Frederick Williams reign on December 1, 1640. For the new elector; however, the problem was that he was in no position to act. In 1640 the Thirty Years War was in its twenty-second year. Of the three territories of Brandenburg-Prussia, only Ducal Prussia had escaped the ravages of war. The domestic situation was tenuous at best. The economy was in shambles. Many of Brandenburg's towns were destroyed. Both manufacturing and agriculture were at a standstill in the province. According to multiple sources Prussia had lost close to fifty percent of its population. Political power was still held by George William's Catholic first minister Adam von Schwarzenburg, who was acting as the elector's representative in Berlin. The estates of the realm while in a strong position showed little interest in upsetting the current political situation. This proved to be a saving grace for the dynasty. At this moment had the Junkers acted it is very unlikely that the elector could have opposed them.

The military situation was little better. The state relied on mercenaries who defended the handful of fortresses and cities still held by the Hohenzollerns outside of Ducal Prussia. The Junkers had proven unreliable at raising troops under their feudal obligations. The result was that by 1640 an army of fewer than 3000 men was all that was left. The Dutch occupied the Rhenish provinces. In Brandenburg, Swedish forces occupied much of the Mark.

On the geo-political front Brandenburg-Prussia was in an isolated predicament. George William had been forced to join the imperial forces following major victories early in the war. This was then followed by reversals when Gustavus Adolphus and his Swedish army invaded. Prussia's switch from the Protestant to Catholic side had alienated the Dutch and led to the subsequent occupation of Cleves. Relations with the emperor were not any better. Prussia began the war as a leading Protestant state within the Holy Roman Empire. It was also a member of the Protestant

block and as such the Catholic emperor distrusted the elector. The one important relationship still in good standing was Prussia's relationship with the Polish crown. This ensured the safety of Ducal Prussia as it was still a fief of Poland and the elector as duke could call on the Polish king if invaded.⁵⁹

The 1637 death of Borislav XIV of Pomerania should have led to the incorporation of Pomerania into Prussia, but the timing of the duke's death could not have come at a worse time for Prussia. George William in 1637 was unable to press his claims without a military and Frederick William was no better off in 1640. Most of Pomerania was occupied by Sweden and the final disposition of the Pomerania claim remanded in limbo until the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, because neither Prussia nor Sweden could muster the necessary military or international support to complete the annexation of Pomerania.

The first challenge facing Frederick William in 1640 was to reestablish his authority among his subjects and to rebuild Prussia's damaged international relations. Until Prussia's situation improved he could do nothing about the claim to Pomerania. Over the next two years he slowly improved the situation by signing truces with both the Dutch and Swedes. Additionally, Frederick William began building a new standing army. Further political improvements developed in 1641 when his father's Catholic first minister Schwarzenburg died. This enabled Frederick William to assert total control over his government which had not been the case while Schwarzenburg was alive. Over the next four years, according to Koch, the Elector was able to build "by 1646 [a new army] of approximately 3000 men"⁶⁰ based strategically out of Cleves. These troops enabled the

⁵⁹ Schevill, *Great Elector*, 110-28, Schevill is a great source on the early situation in Prussia following William Fredericks ascension to elector and duke.

⁶⁰ Koch, *A History of Prussia*, Koch's number of 3000 men gives an idea of how fast the Prussian army had been expanded and helps to explain French interest in assisting Prussian at Westphalia, 49

elector to protect the Rhenish territories and to strengthen his diplomatic hand as the Westphalia negotiations began.

By 1646 all the parties in the twenty-eight year old conflict started peace talks. This process lasted until October 24, 1648 when the final treaty was reached. By the terms of the Treaty of Westphalia, Prussia received a reduced portion of its Pomerania claim. This territory stretched from just east of the Oder estuary to the border of Royal Prussia. According to Koch, a weak Brandenburg was not in the strategic interest of France. A stronger Prussia could be a useful and a more reliable ally than Sweden. So through French mediation Prussia was compensated for the loss of Stettin and western Pomerania with the prompt acquisition of Halberstadt, Camin, and Minden. Later, following the death of the current archbishop, the bishopric of Magdeburg would also be incorporated into Prussia. While the terms of the treaty did not satisfy Frederick William's goal of acquiring all of Pomerania, the settlement did allow for the restoration of peace and an expansion of Hohenzollern dominions.⁶¹

The Treaty of Westphalia brought to an end the most dangerous period for the Hohenzollerns during the early modern era. The dynasty came out with a reduced share of the Pomeranian claim, but it gained additional territories. The Hohenzollerns were not forced to relinquish the full Pomeranian claim, giving the elector grounds to assert the claim at a later time. By maintaining the entire Pomeranian claim the dynasty kept a basis to act against Swedish Pomerania and Royal Prussia in the future. The marriage of Elector Frederick William in 1646 to Louise Henriette of Nassua-Orange strengthened ties to the Dutch Republic. This marriage proved unintentionally advantageous for the dynasty because it later improved Prussian claims to East Frisia even though the explicit goal was simply to create closer ties with the Dutch Republic.

⁶¹ John G. Gagliardo, *Germany under the Old Regime, 1600-1790* (London: Longman, 1991), Gagliardo provides a detailed summary of the Treaty of Westphalia.

Any future action by the elector with regard to dynastic claims required Prussia to build and maintain an effective army. Frederick William determined that the army's failings lay in the outdated feudal system whereby the Junkers gathered troops and linked up with the elector's own men to defend the realm. If Frederick William was going to move forward on any of the dynasty's claims major reforms had to take place within the army. To begin, a switch was made from a feudal army to a new fulltime professional force. This meant changing feudal military dues into monetary dues from the Junkers and levying new taxes on the peasants and cities to pay and equip these men. The result was a new standing army in 1648 of roughly three thousand men. This total gradually rose to a standard peacetime army of about nine thousand by the end of the reign of Elector Frederick William.⁶²

The first test of the elector's new army came in 1651 when he moved to assert his claims on the duchies of Berg and Jülich. The claim in this instance was the old Jülich-Berg-Cleves inheritance from Anne of Prussia. This claim had sparked a war some forty years earlier between the Hohenzollerns and the House of Zweibrücken-Neuburg, but was settled in an in 1614 with the Peace of Xanten. In 1651 with Peace of Westphalia in place Elector Frederick William moved to assert his claim seize both Berg and Jülich.⁶³

Citing his dynastic claims and a repressive Neuberg policy towards the Protestant minorities the elector occupied both duchies. The elector had gone to war assuming that he had Dutch military support based on his wife's family ties to the Orange-Nassau family who were in tentative control of the Dutch government. The elector, however, had miscalculated and the Dutch were unwilling to go

⁶² Gordon Craig, *The Politics of the Prussian Army, 1640-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), Craig gives a detailed accounting about the changes made to the Prussian army under Frederick William; Schevill, *Great Elector*, Schevill gives the reader political insight into the importance of the army reforms.

⁶³ Schevill, *Great Elector*, 139-45, Schevill provides background information for the reasons the 1651 war started.

to war over Berg and Jülich. By contrast, the count of Zweibrücken-Neuburg rapidly mobilized support in his defense. As a Catholic, the count mobilized the surrounding Catholic states and rapidly their combined numbers forced the elector to seek the emperor's support in ending the war. The situation in Berg and Jülich was a learning moment for Frederick William. He could not move on any claim unilaterally. If he was to assert his claims he needed a great power's assistance. To this end he approached the emperor to negotiate a settlement to the conflict. The emperor agreed and won for Frederick William a guarantee of Protestant rights in Jülich and Berg. This face-saving measure was enough, but he had failed to achieve his primary goal of annexing Jülich and Berg.⁶⁴

The rapprochement that began with the emperor's assistance in the Jülich and Berg conflict was built on by Ferdinand III receiving the elector's vote as next emperor. In return for the elector's vote the emperor gave assurances that he would support the Prussian claim in Pomerania against the Swedes. The rapid move from the Berg and Jülich claim straight into the Pomeranian claim shows that these claims were at the very heart of Frederick William's foreign policy. Frederick was willing to forego actions on the Rhine in order to get assistance asserting his Pomeranian claim.⁶⁵

In mid 1654 a major political change took place in Sweden: Queen Krista abdicated and Charles X came to power. Charles X was determined to expand Swedish territory, power, and influence. His target was the unwieldy Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth. The invasion of Poland in July 1655 forced elector Frederick William into the difficult position of opposing Charles X because Ducal Prussia was a fief of Poland⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Schevill, *Great Elector*, 144-46, Schevill is a good source of what the 1651 war taught Frederick William.

⁶⁵ Schevill, *Great Elector*, 145-54, Schevill explains how Austrian and Prussian relations improve.

⁶⁶ Schevill, *Great Elector*, 159-62, Schevill explains the beginnings of the First Northern War.

The war that followed became known as the First Northern War. The First Northern War opened with Frederick William as a loyal subject of the king of Poland. He opposed Charles X's invasion of Ducal Prussia with a force of 9,000 men, but agreed become neutral and swear an oath of fealty to the Swedish King in the Treaty of Königsberg on January 17th 1656. As the war progressed Swedish manpower needs drove Charles to negotiate two subsequent treaties. First on June 25, 1656, in the Treaty of Marienburg, Charles X agreed to give Ermland, a region in the middle of Ducal Prussia, to Frederick William in exchange for his support. This region was a part of the dynastic claim carried over from Anne of Prussia and as such Frederick William joined the war. Later that autumn Charles X offered the additional concessions of an end of Swedish vassalage, which began with the Treaty of Königsberg and the revocation of his half of the customs duties in Pomerania and Ducal Prussia. This made up the main points of the Treaty of Labiau.⁶⁷

In May of 1657 the Emperor Ferdinand III of the Holy Roman Empire declared war on Sweden. Frederick William quickly changed sides. Under the terms of alliance Frederick William received full sovereignty for Ducal Prussia. By ending both Swedish and Polish vassalage over Ducal Prussia, Frederick would become an independent ruler free of all feudal overlords. This freedom both increased his international stature as the ruler of a newly independent state and improved his ability to assert his other dynastic claims, especially in Royal Prussia. The war that defeated Sweden lasted three years, but was finally concluded on May 3rd 1660 with Treaty of Oliva.

Over the remainder of Frederick William's electorship he was involved in a series of wars primarily against the French and Ottoman Turks. In 1674 Prussia joined the imperial forces in a war against France which was at war with Spain and the Dutch Republic. In late 1674 Sweden joined the

⁶⁷ Schevill, *Great Elector*, 162-86, Schevill gives a detailed accounting of the First Northern War: Peter H. Wilson, *German Armies War and German Politics, 1648-1806* (London: UCL Press, 1947), Wilson gives insight into the military actions of the First Northern War and relations between Prussia and Austria during the war.

war. This opened up the possibility once again of obtaining the remaining portions of the Pomeranian claim and Frederick William moved to engage the Swedish forces who had invaded Brandenburg.

While his original goal to support the emperor was still a priority, he now saw an opportunity to do so while gaining control of Stettin and western Pomerania. Through the winter of 1674-75 Frederick rebuilt his army after a series of defeats in 1674 in Alsace. By spring Frederick had amassed an army of some twenty thousand men. In June of 1675 Frederick won two military victories: at Rathenow on the 15th and at Fehrbellin on June 18th. The result was the rapid collapse of the entire Swedish position in Pomerania. At the same time the victories caused peers to give Frederick William the title "The Great Elector" indicating an enhanced international profile.⁶⁸

Over the next two years Frederick occupied Pomerania, but in failing to support his allies sufficiently with military assistance, the French were able to defeat both. The Dutch were the first to withdraw on August 10, 1678 and four months later Emperor Leopold I also signed a peace treaty. With the defeat of his allies Frederick was forced at Saint-Germain on June 29, 1679 to sue for peace. By terms of the treaty, Frederick was given 300,000 thalers and all remaining territory in Pomerania east of the river Oder. The treaty enabled Prussia to solidify control of eastern Pomerania while maintaining the existing claim to the western half.⁶⁹

Between 1679 and 1686 Frederick William was an ally of the French and he tried in vain to draw France into supporting a war with Sweden. This was unsuccessful and in 1686 with his health failing Frederick William signed a new alliance with Austria. Before the alliance could be concluded Prussia and Austria had to settle the outstanding claims in Silesia. The compromise both sides agreed to was that Jagerdorf, Liegnitz, Wohlau, and Brieg would remain under Austrian control and

⁶⁸ Schevill, *Great Elector*, 291-312, Schevill provides a detailed account of the war with France and the defeat of Swedish forces in Pomerania.

⁶⁹ Schevill, *Great Elector*, 336, Schevill details the terms of the Treaty of Saint-Germain

that Schwiebus fell under Prussian control for the remainder of Frederick William's reign. The second part of this treaty of alliance was that the Austrians agreed to recognize the right of the House of Hohenzollern to inherit East Frisia in the event that that ruling line died out. This agreement provided a temporary, but acceptable settlement for both states. The final section of the treaty stipulated that the elector would send troops to support the emperor against the Ottoman Turks. Under the preceding terms the treaty of alliance was signed on March 3rd 1686. This final treaty strengthened the dynasty's claims in East Frisia while providing a temporary settlement for the Silesian claims.

On May 9, 1688 Elector Frederick William died. In his forty-eight year reign he had taken half all of the Pomeranian claim east of the Oder and gained sizable lands including Minden and Magdeburg. These territories helped to offset the loss of Stettin and western Pomerania. He had won major victories against the Sweden and Poland forcing both to end of vassalage of Ducal Prussia. This strengthened the claim on Royal Prussia because the Hohenzollerns were now sovereigns not vassals in Ducal Prussia. He had strengthened claims to East Frisia by treaty with the emperor. He had tried in vain to assert the Berg and Jülich claims during the 1651 war. He was able in 1666 to get the House of Neuburg to sign a mutual inheritance treaty improving the existing claims on Berg and Jülich. Lastly, all five of the claims remained intact and the claims to East Frisia, Ducal Prussia, and Berg and Jülich had all been strengthened.⁷⁰

In his political testament Frederick William wrote of alliances and dynastic claims: "you can stand in good alliance very well primarily with those who have no pretentions regarding your lands, also with those who are close neighbors, with the emperor as superior and regarding the lands

⁷⁰ Carsten, *Origins of Prussia*, Carsten is a good source for information regarding Prussia and the Treaty of Westphalia; Schevill, *Great Elector*, Schevill provides a comprehensive breakdown of the reign of elector Frederick William; Black, *International Relations*, Black is a detailed source for the wars of the 17th Century.

closely adjacent to Silesia." ⁷¹ This passage warns against alliances, especially with the emperor, whereby the claims on Silesia are sacrificed in order to secure that alliance. While an arrangement had been established during his lifetime with regards to Silesia, Frederick William wanted to leave the final settlement of these claims open for his successors at a time that would be more opportune to act.

⁷¹ Political Testament of Frederick William", German History in Documents and Images, accessed February 2, 2015, 6.

IX. From Prince to King the Reign of Frederick I

With the death of Elector Frederick William his son Frederick came to power as Elector Frederick III in April 1688. His father had left the thirty-year old a state with a strong standing army, tighter social bonds between elector and Junker aristocrats, a financially stable government, and five claims to act on. It therefore fell to the new duke of Prussia and elector of Brandenburg to use his skills in acquiring these dynastic claims.

Asserting his rights to any of the five claims would have been an understandable first move for the new ruler; however, one other goal took precedence for the young elector and that was to become a king. At the time of his ascension Frederick's armies were assisting Emperor Leopold I in the Turkish War of 1683-99. Because his armies were engaged in supporting the emperor elector Frederick III had limited options other than to wait during the first eleven years of his reign. Rather than getting the Prussia into a war, Frederick preferred to use the Prussian army as a kind of mercenary force which did nothing to advance the dynastic claims of Prussia. During the Turkish War the emperor paid for the Prussian army's expenses, which allowed Prussia to use much of the revenues that would be used to maintain the army on other expenses. Later this policy of receiving cash for the services of the Prussian army caused his grandson Frederick II to refer to him as the "Mercenary King."⁷²

While Frederick III was less aggressive than his father in his pursuit of dynastic claims, he did maintain all five of them. His central focus was not these claims, but the elevation of his house to the regal status of king. This he managed to achieve in his first foreign policy move as elector. In 1700 Charles II of Spain died. He was the last Spanish Hapsburg and his death triggered a

⁷² Dwyer, *Rise of Prussia*, Dwyer details military arrangements between Leopold I of Austria and Frederick I; Black, *European International Relations*, Black breaks down the Austro-Turkish War of 1683-99.

international crisis. The crisis stemmed from the lack of a clear heir. Both the Hapsburgs and Bourbons claimed the right to crown the new king despite Phillip of Anjou being named by Charles as his heir. England and Austria saw a united Spanish and French crown as a strategic threat. Because of the strong and capable army it possessed, Frederick III was asked by Austria to join the war. The negotiation process produced a treaty that was signed on 16th November 1700. Clark sums up the terms of the treaty: "Frederick undertook to supply a contingent of 8,000 men to the Emperor.... The Viennese court agreed, for its part, not only to recognize the foundation of the new title [king in Prussia], but also to work towards its general acceptance."⁷³

The agreement, while appearing to benefit Austria more, was a strategic coup for Frederick III. While Leopold I got additional troops at no expense, what Frederick III got was a crown and recognition of his divine right as a king. On the 18th of January 1701 Duke Frederick III officially became King Frederick I in Prussia. With his coronation, the elevation of the House of Hohenzollern from feudal duke to king was complete. Just as important, the Holy Roman Empire now had two kings, a fact not lost on the Protestant rulers in the empire. By the terms of the treaty, King Frederick I remained at a lower rank than the emperor, but even Emperor Leopold I was forced to recognize that Frederick had no princely equal within the Empire.

The question does rise why Frederick would be willing to sacrifice so many men for a simple title. To explain the importance of kingship one needs to understand the importance of the monarchical order the 18th century. Other than a small number of states like the Dutch Republic, the Swiss Confederation, and the Republic of Venice almost every other state outside of the Holy Roman Empire in Europe was a monarchy. This change in title afforded Prussia more clout and as a royal family, Prussian envoys and the king himself were introduced in a way reflecting this elevated status. Within the broader European community Prussia began to be courted as an ally by nations

⁷³ Clark, Christopher M. *Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia*. page 71

like France and Great Britain. In the 18th century that kings derived their powers from God and a duke derived his power from the king.

The most salient point for us is that as a king the Hohenzollerns could make demands of a prince with considerably more force than when he was a fellow prince. This meant that claims in East Frisia and Berg and Jülich carried more weight. In future peace treaties Prussia could claim larger rewards due to its right as a monarchical state, as will be seen in Pomerania. Territory in dispute could also be acted on more comprehensively as would be seen in Royal Prussia and Silesia.

The following year the only territorial gain achieved under Frederick I took place. On March 8, 1702 his great uncle King William III of England and the head of house Orange-Nassua died without without an heir. This ended the Orange line which possessed, as a count of the empire, territory in Westphalia. According to Peter Wilson:

Frederick claimed William of Orange's German possessions...Moers and Gelden. While these were not one of the primary claims this just shows how the dynastic claims process continued. These were subsequently obtained with Anglo-Dutch backing. Prussian influence was further consolidated in Westphalia with the acquisition of most of Tecklenburg after Frederick bought up the rights of other claimants.⁷⁴

Frederick also secured further imperial support for agreements reached with East Frisian nobles which solidified Hohenzollern claims on the region still further.⁷⁵

Gelden expanded on Cleves and gave Prussia control of both east and west banks of the Rhine. While these territories were physically small they were worth nearly 400,000 thalers annually

⁷⁴ Wilson, Peter H. *German Armies War and German Politics*, 153

⁷⁵ Wilson, Peter H. *German Armies War and German Politics*, 135-37

in taxes and this was a huge boost to the state's revenues. The addition of these territories helped to solidify Prussia's western frontiers into a more cohesive landmass.

Just as important as the death of William III of England was the start of Great Northern War. This had begun in 1700 as Russia, Denmark, and Poland all declared war on the waning Baltic power, Sweden. According to Jeremy Black, the Swedes succeeded forcing both Denmark and Poland to ultimately withdraw from the conflict in the first years of the war by winning a series of decisive military victories. While Charles's armies fought well against these two states his forces meet in Peter I of Russia, a man with both the resources (money, food stocks, and military hardware) and manpower to wage a prolonged war. Over the remainder of Frederick's reign the war raged on with Peter I steadily invading and occupying Swedish territory along the eastern Baltic. More importantly to Prussia, Sweden's defeats opened up the possibility for a successfully acting on the Pomerania claim by invading Swedish Pomerania.⁷⁶

The last diplomatic act of Frederick's reign was not completed until just after his death in February 1713. This was the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht which formally ended the War of Spanish Succession. Because of Prussia's faithful service to the emperor during the War of Spanish Succession Frederick I received Neuchâtel, a region bordering the Swiss Confederation. Though Neuchâtel was a welcome territorial gain, the real benefit for Prussia was the universal recognition of Frederick I as a king. By signing the Treaty of Utrecht all the parties including Hapsburg Austria, France, Great Britain, Spain, the Dutch Republic, and the members of the Holy Roman Empire all recognized the new title.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Wilson, *German Armies War and German Politics*, Wilson gives insight into the lead up to Prussia's entry into the Great Northern War; Black, *European International Relations*, Black provides information about the the conduct of the Great Northern War prior to Prussia's entry.

⁷⁷ Black, *European International Relations*, Black details the end of the War of Spanish Secession.

In the 25th of February 1713 Frederick I died. In the twenty-five years Frederick I was on the throne only minor changes took place regarding the five primary dynastic claims held by the family. He did strengthen the claim to East Frisia and watched closely the developments underway against Sweden. The kingdom's claims did enjoy a new strength because the claims were now being pressed by a royal house not a princely state. His successor, King Frederick William I, would act swiftly on the Swedish weakness soon after the conclusion of the Treaty of Utrecht and the passing of Frederick I.

X. King Frederick William I takes Stettin and Centralizes the State

Frederick William I became king on February 25, 1713. As he took the throne the War of Spanish Secession ended. With the end of the war Prussia was free to turn its attentions north where the Great Northern War was raging. The Swedish Empire, once the master of the Baltic Sea was being systematically being dismembered by Russia's Peter I. This process was aided by the Danes and Poles. By 1713 Sweden had lost Finland and the Livonian States as far south as Courland. With Russia's success Frederick William I was now in a position to move on his outstanding claim to Swedish Pomerania. Sweden, for its part, had the opportunity to prevent Prussia's entry into the war, Jeremy Black writes: "However, Charles's [XII] approaches were hindered by his unwillingness to agree to territorial losses"⁷⁸ which Frederick William I would have insisted on in order to join the Swedish side. Instead of conceding some territory, Charles balked at the idea of losing parts of Pomerania which pushed Frederick William towards the Russians.

Prussian involvement in the Great Northern War began as a neutral third party asked to oversee parts of Pomerania by Russia and its alliance members. When Stettin fell in September 1713 neutral Prussian and Holstein troops moved into the city and acted as a peace keeping force in what became known as "The Stettin Sequestration."⁷⁹ The idea was that Prussia and Holstein would keep Swedish Pomerania safe so that the Russians and Saxons did not have to occupy the region and once a peace treaty was signed that the province would be returned to Sweden. The problem with this idea was that Charles XII did not view the Prussian troops occupying parts of Pomerania as the act of a neutral party. Relations between the two kingdoms steadily deteriorated and finally broke down completely when on the 17th of May 1715 Prussia declared war. For joining the war Prussia

⁷⁸ Black, *European International Relations*, 111.

⁷⁹ R.Nisbet Bain. *Cambridge Modern History: Volume V, Chapter XIX* (London:Macmillan & Company, 1918), <https://books.google.com>, accessed February 27, 2015, 609.

was promised all of Pomerania south and east of the river Preen by Russia. This constituted the rump of the remaining Pomeranian claim.⁸⁰

Over the next five years Prussia supported the alliance against Sweden by participating in limited military actions in Pomerania and by occupying Pomerania. On January 21, 1720 Sweden signed the Treaty of Stockholm conceding to Frederick William I all the land in Pomerania south and east of the Preen River. With the conquest of Pomerania south of the Preen, Frederick William I turned his attention to domestic affairs. For almost the entire remainder of his reign Frederick William remained at peace, only briefly supporting Austria in the Austro-Turkish of 1734. It proved to be one of the longest periods of peace for the kingdom and it resulted in a period of military expansion and modernization for the army. In addition, Prussia improved both the economic and public administration through a centralization process. This larger army and more efficient administration later enabled Frederick II to acquire almost every territory for which the Hohenzollerns had a dynastic claim.⁸¹

To begin these reforms Frederick William I needed to establish a new central administration for finance, the army, the courts, and domestic affairs. These changes to the government structure resulted in the formation of an early version of a modern cabinet known as the General Directory. This changed the provincial based administration with its governor and staff people reported to him and from there the governor reported to the king. In its place was an administration where all the

⁸⁰ Black, Jeremy. *European International Relations, 1648-1815*. page 111; R.Nisbet Bain. *Cambridge Modern History: Volume V, Chapter XIX* (London:Macmillan & Company, 1918), <https://books.google.com>, accessed February 27, 2015, 609.

⁸¹ Dorwart, *Administrative Reforms*, Dorwart is a good source for the administrative reforms of Prussia under Frederick William I.

members of a department reported to a department head in Berlin who in turn reported to the king.⁸²

The changes made in the central administration were mirrored by changes in individual departments like finance, judicial, and the military. These allowed the army to expand from an estimated range of 30,000-40,000 men during the Great Northern War to close to 80,000-90,000 men by 1740. To aid in the recruiting and maintaining the army the canton system was established. To ensure adequate foodstuffs during war and in times of dearth, a granary system was set up.⁸³

These changes did not enhance the dynastic claims directly; however, they improved efficiency within the state and enabled the Hohenzollerns to maintain a larger standing army. This larger army enabled the kingdom to have a stronger more flexible defense along its indefensible territorial borders. The larger army also allowed Prussia to have the flexibility to act on the dynastic claims when the situation was opportune. While domestic reforms were the center piece of Frederick William's administration he did move to settle one more on the dynasty's claims.

In 1713 Charles VI of Austria was still without a male heir. With no son he began to negotiations with the other rulers of Europe to have them accept his daughter, Maria Teresa, as his heir. As part of Pragmatic Sanction, Charles VI offered each ruler benefits ranging from territory to trade benefits and in the case of Prussia, recognition of the kingdom's claims to the duchies of Berg and Jülich. This claim became the central focus of Frederick William's foreign policy after 1730. The

⁸² Dorwart, *Administrative Reforms*, Dorwart details the reforms in the administration between 1713 and 1735; Busch, *Military System*, Busch is a good source for the military reforms of Frederick William I.

⁸³ Craig, *Politics of the Prussian Army*, Craig writes about the relations between the state and the military in the 18th century; Busch, *Military System*, Busch is the source for the size of the Prussian army; Dorwart, *Administrative Reforms*, Dorwart discusses the use and establishment of granary system.

reason was that the Neuburg family had signed an agreement with Elector Frederick William that if the family failed to produce an heir that the duchies of Berg and Jülich would be inherited by the House of Hohenzollern. In 1730 the last Neuburg duke, Karl Phillip III, was still without a son. It looked increasingly likely that the family line would fail and that the agreement would become actionable. Frederick William I therefore wanted to ensure the emperor's support. In order to secure Frederick William's support for the Pragmatic Sanction, Charles VI agreed to recognize Frederick William I as the legitimate heir to the duchies of Berg and Jülich if Karl Phillip died without an heir.⁸⁴

The problem for Frederick William I was that unbeknownst to him both France and the Dutch Republic had agreed to sign the Pragmatic Sanction only if Charles VI did not recognize Frederick's claim, along with other minor concessions. According to Reddaway, after a 1732 meeting between Frederick William I and Charles VI, the Frederick changed his views of Austria from "a German overlord, heir to the dignity of the Caesars, who when the time was ripe would look with paternal complacency upon the Prussian claims"⁸⁵ to "reveal[ed] a rival monarch, pompous, contemptuous, and shifty."⁸⁶ The subsequent discovery of the deal made between Charles VI and France and the Dutch Republic confirmed Frederick William's suspicions about the emperor and dramatically soured relations with Austria. It was the end of an era in Austro-Prussian relations. Since the end of the Elector Frederick William's reign relations between the emperor and Prussia had been strong. The discovery that Charles VI had betrayed his promise to support the Berg and Jülich claim would prove to be not only a diplomatic blunder of the first class, but it would set into

⁸⁴ Reddaway, *Frederick the Great*, Reddaway is a good source for information about the Pragmatic Sanction and the agreement with Prussia; Macartney, *Habsburg and Hohenzollern*, MacCarthy provides information about the Hapsburg view on Prussia and the Pragmatic Sanction.

⁸⁵ Reddaway, *Frederick the Great*, 62.

⁸⁶ Reddaway, *Frederick the Great*, 62.

motion the subsequent alienation of Prussia for decades to come. So rapidly and deep did the rift opened up after 1732, that before his death it was said that Frederick William I in pointing to his son said "There stands one who will avenge me."⁸⁷

The French and Dutch arrangements of 1739 allowed Prussia to nullify its obligations to the Pragmatic Succession. By stating to France and the Dutch Republic that Austria would not support the Berg and Jülich claims, the emperor had exposed the Austrian Empire to the dual possibilities of losing its most likely ally and making a dangerous new enemy who had long-standing claims in Silesia. As Frederick William I died on May 31, 1740 "the one who will avenge me" came to the throne.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Reddaway, *Frederick the Great*, 62.

⁸⁸ Clark, *Iron Kingdom: Rise and Downfall of Prussia*, Clark details the failure of the Pragmatic Sanction and how it leads to war; Reddaway, *Frederick the Great*, Reddaway is a good source on Dutch and French motives for opposing Prussian expansion into Berg and Jülich.

XI. From Claims to Prussian Territory: How Frederick II Settled the Claims

With the death of Frederick William I the failure of Austria to come up with a final settlement for Prussia in Silesia took on a new prominence. This new importance did not come from any change in the disputed nature of the claim, but rather from the king's, Frederick II's, willingness to act on that claim. His father had left Frederick II a well trained and professional army, backed up with deep stores of grain and a vast treasury.

The claims that were actionable in May 1740 were Berg and Jülich, Swedish Pomerania north of the River Preen, and Royal Prussia. The claims in East Frisia and Silesia though valid, were not actionable at the moment of his ascent to the throne. In East Frisia, the aging Charles Edzard was still count, though without a male heir, and the Pragmatic Sanction prevented action in Silesia for the moment.

Among the three claims that Frederick II could act on in 1740 none looked promising. To move against Swedish Pomerania would invite a war against Denmark and though Sweden was not the power it had been in 1648 it was still capable of mustering a determined defense. In the east, Royal Prussia looked like the most obvious choice to act on, but the problem with Royal Prussia was the close alliance between Austria and King Augustus III of Saxony and Poland. This alliance prevented any military move on Royal Prussia and the close diplomatic relationship between Austria and Russia only added to the danger. This left just the claims on Berg and Jülich. These too could not be acted on. An invasion of both invited war with not only Austria, but also the possibility of either the Dutch or French entering the potential conflict. It is for these reasons that the young and by all historical accounts ambitious Frederick II chose to wait rather than act.

For the first four months of Frederick's reign he exercised a prudent, calm, but forceful foreign policy. He championed the Protestants of Hesse-Cassel against the Archbishop of Mainz and averted a possible war. Frederick II reached a settlement over land disputes with the Bishop of

Liege over Herstal and the county of Hoorn. Both of the territorial disputes were resolved using heavy handed tactics including military threats, but were ultimately resolved peacefully and to the satisfaction of the king. In these two diplomatic moves Frederick II showed himself as a different sort of Prussian king from his more domestically minded father. While these two moves hinted at the new steadfast nature of Prussian foreign policy the true departure became evident after May 25, 1744 when the last East Frisia Prince Charles Edzard passed without an heir.

Unlike previous moments when a claim became actionable Frederick did not wait for some other state to make a claim. Within days Frederick had marched a sizable force into East Frisia and asserted his claim in force. With all of Europe unprepared for the sudden speed at which he moved all the other rulers could do is file complaints in Berlin stating, "This is Strong, this is lively."⁸⁹ Frederick II was unconcerned. In less than five months he had already asserted his right to one Hohenzollern claim without firing a shot.

After a bloodless summer it looked like Frederick was settling down. His love of philosophy and the arts had seen him invite Voltaire, the preeminent philosopher of the age, to Prussia and gave a public impression that the new king was settling into his role as head of state. While the actions in East Frisia had caused some alarm the most troublesome development was not his actions, but his lack of action. Upon the death of his father, Frederick William I, the compact between Prussia and Austria that was known as the Pragmatic Sanction ended. Charles VI hoped the young king would be a friend of Austria. Charles VI arranged for the marriage of Frederick II and Elisabeth Beven in hopes that he would be amenable to Austrian plans; however, Charles VI and the Austrian court had badly misjudged their actions of the previous eight years.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Reddaway, *Frederick the Great*, 87.

⁹⁰ Reddaway, *Frederick the Great*, Reddaway is a good source for information about the months leading up to the First Silesian War.

So poor was Austrian intelligence regarding Prussia that it appears from various historical sources that the Austrian court was completely unaware of even the late Frederick William's change in attitude towards the Hapsburgs, let alone Frederick II. Frederick II, according to Reddaway, blamed Austria for his loveless marriage, the death of his best friend Katte, and betraying their part of the Pragmatic Sanction under his father. While meddling in Frederick's personal life and betraying his father's portion of the Pragmatic Sanction may have been missteps by the Austrians, the biggest miscalculation Austria made was their failure to settle the claims in Silesia. Reddaway writes that, "still no one at Vienna had the least suspicion of the blow that Frederick was preparing."⁹¹

On October 26, 1740 the failure of the Charles VI to secure the Pragmatic Sanction with Prussia began a dramatic showdown. That day Charles VI died and immediately Frederick II began preparations to occupy Silesia and to secure his claims by force. Through November Frederick kept up a masquerade, but finally in December he met with the special envoy from the Viennese court, Marquis di Botta, and stated forthrightly: "I am resolved to safeguard my rights [dynastic claims] over parts of Silesia by occupying it. Yield it to me and I will support the throne of Maria Theresa and procure the imperial crown for her husband."⁹² Frederick II's statement to di Botta was a clear clearly shows he was asserting his claims to Silesia. The response by di Botta made Maria Theresa's feelings plain: "Impossible for us."⁹³ Within a fortnight Frederick was well inside Silesia and on the road to asserting his claim to territories to which women Maria Theresa could not inherit over a man with a claim to the same territory.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Reddaway, *Frederick the Great*, 97.

⁹² Reddaway, *Frederick the Great*, 98.

⁹³ Reddaway, *Frederick the Great*, 98.

⁹⁴ Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, Clark is a good source for the understanding the early moments of the First Silesian War; Carlyle, *HISTORY OF FRIEDRICH*, Carlyle is a good source for Frederick II's actions immediately following Charles VI death.

Over the course of the next two years Prussia under Frederick II would fight Austria alone. Following the defeat of an Austrian army at Mollwitz on April 10, 1741 France signed a Treaty of Alliance in Breslau with Prussia. One month later Bavaria joined the Prussian-Franco alliance. The enlarged war and continuing defeats forced Austria to peace with Prussia. On July 28, 1742 Austria and Prussia signed the Treaty of Berlin which conferred upon Frederick II almost all of Silesia. This was the second dynastic claim that Frederick II secured in less than five years.⁹⁵

While it is fair to note that Frederick II was entitled to only the five territories which I previously mentioned it is important to take into consideration that had he not taken all of Silesia and secured his frontier on the formidable Silesian Mountains an invasion by Austria would have been very probable. Post-war Anglo-American historians like Clark and Dwyer state that the occupation of all of Silesia was an act of militaristic territorial aggrandizement; however, these authors ignore the claims that Frederick II asserted to di Botta. Frederick II clearly stated it was his dynastic claims which were the reasons for the invasion. It is also important to point out that Frederick offered to accept just lower Silesia before he invaded and Maria Theresa refused the offer.

Two additional wars over Silesia followed the Treaty of Berlin. The three Silesian Wars together changed the balance of power in Europe. Prior to the Silesian war Prussia was a second rate power. By the end of the Third Silesian War Prussia was recognized as the second great German state along side Austria. Writing about the effects of the Silesian War, Clark writes: "The Prussian invasion of Silesia was a real revolution... From here unfolded a sequence of shocks and

⁹⁵ Carsten, *Origins of Prussia*, Carsten is a good source for the conduct of the First Silesian War, Black, *European International Relations*, Black is a good source for information about the wider European War resulting from the invasion of Silesia; Reddaway, *Frederick the Great*, Reddaway is a great source for the conduct of both the 1st and 2nd Silesian War.

realignments that runs like a long fuse through the history of modern Europe."⁹⁶ Prussia's future looked bright and it still had an additional three claims that Frederick II could act on.

The next dynastic claim that Frederick looked to act on was the oldest, Royal Prussia. Frederick had over the previous twenty six year used his military to to achieve his goals. Now he turned to diplomacy to gain control of the last territory he wanted. To take control of Royal Prussia the needs of Russia and Prussia needed to become aligned so that an agreement could be reached. For Prussia, its justification for taking over Royal Prussia extended back over three hundred years through the Pomeranian claim and over one hundred and fifty years through the Ducal Prussia claim. For Russia the weakness of the Polish central government had already involved it in the Bar Confederation War and Poland's close ties with the Ottoman Empire threatened Russia's western flank in any future war with the Turks. Additionally for Russia, expansion west had been a maxim established by Peter the Great. So the annexation another piece of Poland was seen as a way to secure the existing borderland as well as a way to weaken an ally of the Ottoman Empire.⁹⁷

The problem for Frederick's plan was Austria. In order to lay claim to Royal Prussia it was important to make sure both Austria and Russia joined in. Frederick knew that Austria was opposed to any further expansion by Prussia so in order to facilitate Austrian support for the plan he had to wait for an opportunity to win its support. That time came in 1770. In 1768 the Russia and Ottoman Empires went to war. In the past wars between Russia and the Ottoman Empire did not tend to

⁹⁶ Clark, *Iron Kingdom*, 211.

⁹⁷ Friedrich, *Other Prussia*, Friedrich is a great source for information about Royal Prussia; Reddaway, *Frederick the Great*, Reddaway details the political work that led to the First Partition of Poland.

bother Austria as the wars were confined to the Ukraine and north Black Sea region, however in 1770 Russian armies were fighting on the lower Danube and threatening Austrian interest there.⁹⁸

Frederick, understanding the optics to Russia of Prussian and Austria working together, began to float the idea that he might along with the Austrians be willing to mediate a peace between the Turks and Russians. Russia rejected the idea, but was concerned by the apparent rapprochement between Austria and Prussia. With growing concerns on January 15, 1772 Russia agreed to the terms of the partition and on August 5, 1772 Austria did as well. When the Partition agreement was announced Frederick used his dynastic claim which was "that it [Pomerellen] had been wrongfully alienated by the Margrave of Brandenburg in 1311, and that if he as suzerain consented to overlook this irregularity, he would still be entitled to the province as heir, since 1637 to the elder branch of the House of Pomerania." In June 1772 Prussian troops began occupying West Prussia and in September the next year the Polish Diet agreed to the partition. Prussia had occupied Royal Prussia without firing a shot, but the key to the region would have to wait for his successor, when during the Second Partition of Poland Danzig fell into Prussian hands.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Reddaway, *Frederick the Great*, Reddaway details the diplomatic work of Prussia during the First Partition of Poland. Macartney, *Habsburg and Hohenzollern*, Macarthy gives the Hapsburg viewpoint on the First Partition of Poland.

⁹⁹ Reddaway, *Frederick the Great*, 329.

XII. Conclusion

The First Partition of Poland and the occupation of Royal Prussia marked the end of the dynastic claims period for Prussia. With the signing of the treaty for the First Partition of Poland and the death of Frederick II on August 17, 1786 the period of dynastic claims passed into history. From that period on nationalism took hold. Wars and territory were no longer about heredity, but who had the military power to take and hold the region. This meant ever larger armies with more lethal weapons.¹⁰⁰

Through the calm slow execution of its rights to lands through the dynastic claims process, Prussia had achieved a remarkable reversal in its fortunes. Prussia had survived trials of the Thirty Years War and slowly risen to be a major European state. Any examination of a map of Europe in 1786 shows how affectively the use of the dynastic claim process had been for Prussia. While still a not a territorially unified state Prussia had linked its eastern and central portions.

To achieve this, Prussia had kept to taking lands to which it held a dynastic claim based on the established rules of 17th and 18th century international system. Asserting these claims had been achieved using several methods: through alliances where the Hohenzollerns received lands as part of service to the winning side, through the rapid occupation of territory following the death of the last ruler, through independent military action, and finally through diplomatic agreement.

The dynastic claims that the Hohenzollerns held were primary driving force behind Prussian expansion in the early modern era. While some territory was incorporated into the expanding Prussian state for which no claim was held, this territory was either purchased or turned over as part of a peace settlement as was seen with Magdeburg and Halberstadt. These gains were infrequent and were seldom substantial with the exception of the territory gained at Westphalia.

¹⁰⁰ Black, *European International Relations*, Black is a good source regarding the changes in international norms at the end of the 18th century.

To help assert their rights to these claims the dynasty reformed its administration through a process of centralization and became financially frugal. This then enabled the dynasty to rapidly expand the army while simultaneously improving training and armaments and amassing stocks of provisions and monies. With the improved functionality of both the military and administrative, the Hohenzollerns of Prussia acted on and incorporated almost all of the territory for which it possessed a claim.

While achieving this goal of expansion through dynastic claims, the Hohenzollerns of Prussia also built a reputation as a defender of the Protestant faith while simultaneously maintaining an evolving policy of religious toleration. Prussia became an ally set out from both within the Holy Roman Empire and from without. The desperate and militaristic nature of the Hohenzollern dynasty spoken about by authors like Clark and Dwyer is a myth; instead, the House of Hohenzollern was led by a series of some of the most confident and secure leaders in European history. These rulers, two of whom achieved the honorary title of Great in their lifetimes, built a new European power between 1640 and 1786: a state built not through Machiavellian territorial aggrandizement, but rather a state built on internationally recognized dynastic claims. These claims built for Hohenzollern Prussia a legacy of legitimacy that it carried into the modern age.

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Maps of Prussia

